



PRESS RELEASE

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Los Cóbanos Compound Declared as First Marine Natural Protected Area

SAN SALVADOR—In order to preserve natural resources and contribute to sustainable development and health for Salvadorans, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), Carlos Jose Guerrero, signed today the declaration of protection of Los Cobanos, in Barra Salada, Sonsonate.

Los Cobanos has an extension of 21,312 hectares (30,445 manzanas). This is not only the first marine natural protected area established in El Salvador, but also the biggest area within the Natural Protected Areas System (SANP, in Spanish) that was created through the Environment Law in 1998. The new protected area encompasses the coastal strip from state-owned Santa Agueda or El Zope –2.5 kilometers south of Acajutla Port– to the mangroves of Barra Salada –20 kilometers southeast, in Sonsonate. The area includes the beach and intermediate mangroves (20,736 hectares or 29,622 manzanas in the marine portion, and 576 hectares or 823 manzanas on land).

The declaration ceremony was attended by Minister Guerrero; the U.S. Ambassador, Charles L. Glazer; the U.S. Agency for International Development Mission Director, Deborah Kennedy-Iraheta; the Minister of Tourism, Ruben Rochi; Congressman Roberto d'Aubuisson Munguía; the President of the Mayors Association, Milagro Navas; the Mayor of Acajutla, Casimiro Sosa; the Mayor of Sonsonate, José Roberto Aquino; the Executive Director of the National Registry Center, Gerardo Suvillaga; and the President of the Institute for Agrarian Transformation, Armando Zepeda. Moreover, representatives of other government institutions, NGOs and community development associations attended the ceremony.

The major importance of this natural area lies on the great quantity and high quality of biodiversity it houses, including the unique coral reefs found in the Pacific Ocean, from Mexico to Costa Rica (sand beaches full of shells, corals, plants, and mangroves) and the huge variety of marine plants and animals that belong to those habitats. In turn, those habitats allow the subsistence of coastal communities that depend on artisanal fishing and the fishing industry.

USAID Promoting Economic Opportunities program, through its Conservation of Critical Waterheds project, has supported the declaration of Los Cobanos. Through the USAID cooperation to MARN, a group of experts will help to delineate, mark, and declare 33,000 hectares of natural protected areas in the southwestern area of the country. Next steps include delineation of the declared area, by using special buoys, and the creation of a management plan to guarantee conservation and adequate use of this important resource.

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